

SOME THOUGHTS COMPARING  
RGVEDIC AND HELLENIC MYTHS

I

When we are thinking of a culture which is not our own, we are necessarily thinking of it by means of conceptions from our own culture, the limits of which are our horizon of understanding the world. When we speak of a culture in a language of another culture, this language will be differently suited to speak of it than to speak of its own culture.

But conceptions and terms, when they meet new matters, do not remain unchanged. They must assimilate them and be assimilated by them, and by undergoing the change they change the culture to which they belong. That is how it becomes possible to understand a foreign culture within one's own culture.

In any case, we usually do not notice it. In the sciences we are used to generalize our conceptions and the meaning of our terms when we meet such phenomena in other cultures as are apt to remind us of other similar phenomena in our world that we know already. Such generalisations make it possible for us to encompass more and more substance by our terms and conceptions. They retain what is identical, but at the same time they lose what is different. So they make us lose not only particularities of foreign cultural horizons with which we are confronted, but also the specific traits of our inherited horizons from which alone we can proceed elsewhere.

Perhaps it is a chance for philology, in the sense of the study of original texts, and indeed its proper task, to correct such a science which abstracts from the fullness of differences, and to reconstitute the richness of cultural particularities within the scope of developed conceptions both general and universal, on the grounds of original texts. In this sense it is the task of philology not only to produce critical editions of texts or preliminary interpretations of them for the further

use of other sciences, such as history, anthropology, sociology, etc., but also to follow the results of these sciences and to reinterpret the texts by means of them, and at the same time to check these results themselves against the original texts.

In this paper I should like to illustrate what the difference is between an « objective » procedure of generalization which effaces the particularities of all the sides of comparison, and a philological analysis which tries to produce generalizations always together with specifications, in order not to lose the richness of contents on any side of comparison.

## II

If a European, or a man speaking a European language, tried to explain what the words about divinities in the R̥gvedic hymns were, he would call these words myths, and their totality he could name R̥gvedic mythology. The very terms which I have mentioned show that the main source of his understanding by analogy these R̥gvedic phenomena would be the Hellenic tradition in European culture. We could therefore try to see how far this analogy reaches, and what specifications we should take into account on the grounds of original texts.

Here we can take but few examples. We shall compare some instances from the R̥gvedic hymns with analogous instances from Hesiod's Theogony or the Homeric hymns which are first rate sources of our knowledge about Hellenic myths.

Let us take a famous hymn RV II 12, str. 1, 3, 12, 13:

*yó jātá evá prathamó mánasvān  
devó devān krátunā paryābhūṣat /  
yásya súṣmād ródasī ábhyasetām  
nṛmṇásya mahná sá janāsa índraḥ //*  
*yó hatvāhim árināt saptá síndhūn  
yó gā udājad apadhā valásya /  
yó áśmanor antár agnīm jajāna  
samvṛk samātsu sá janāsa índraḥ //*  
*yāḥ saptáraśmir vṛṣabhás tūviśmān  
avāsṛjat sártave saptá síndhūn /  
yó rauhiṇám ásphurad vájrabāhur  
dyām āróhantaḥ sá janāsa índraḥ //*  
*dyāvā cid asmai pṛthivī namete  
súṣmāc cid asya párvatā bhayante /  
yāḥ somapṛā nicitó vájrabāhur  
yó vájrahastaḥ sá janāsa índraḥ //*

« Who, when born, the first having mind, god, surpassed the gods in power of will and understanding, from whose roar the two worlds

were frightened because of the greatness of his manliness, O peoples, he is Indra!

Who killed the Dragon and set the seven rivers free, who drove the cows out when he opened the Prison, who gave birth to Agni in the middle of two stones, who vanquishes in combats, O peoples, he is Indra!

Who, the bull with seven reins, the powerful, let the seven rivers flow free, who, with bolt in his hand, cast off Rauhiṇa when he climbed to heaven, O peoples, he is Indra!

Heaven and Earth bow before him, because of his roar the mountains are frightened. Who is the renowned drinker of soma with bolt in his arm, with bolt in his hand, O peoples, he is Indra! ».

Let us now compare it with the description of Zeus descending in combat with the Titans, by Hesiod in *Theogony*, v. 689-696.:

... ámydis d' ár' ap' uranû ēd' ap' Olympu  
astráptōn ésteikhe synōkhadón' hoi dè keraunoí  
íktar háma brontēi te kai asteropēi potéonto  
kheirōs ápo stibarēs, hierēn phlóga eilyphōōntes  
tarpheēs, amphì dè gaia pherésbios esmarágize  
kaioménē, láke d' amphì pyri megál' áspetos hylē.  
ézei dè khthōn pása kai Ōkeanoío rhéethra  
póntos t' atrygetos°

« Suddenly, from Heaven and from Olympus he was descending, lightening continuously. The bolts were flying, together with thundering and lightening, from his heavy hand; the holy flame they rolled thickly; and the Earth which brings life being burnt cried. The unspeakable vast forest crackled in the fire all around. The whole soil boiled, and Ocean's streams, and the harvestless sea ».

Both poems confront us with a bolt-wielding god who overpowers demons or enemies, who excels among other gods, before whom Earth and mountains shake. In both poems the mighty deeds of god are praised.

But there are important differences.

1. The Ṛgvedic poet feels a thrill of wonder, he is a *vípra*. The Hellenic poet feels a thrill of holy horror, *sébas*. We can recognize it in the texts.

2. Hesiod celebrates a single particular deed of Zeus, accomplished when his generation threw the preceding generation of gods, the Titans, from the throne and from Olympus, as the Titan Kronos had previously overpowered his father Uranos in the course of the theogonic and cosmogonic history. With the last revolution a divine pólis arose on Olympus which excluded the forces of nature, as represented by the Titans, from power over the destiny of gods and mortals. Hellenes, living in their early pólesin, felt the power of Zeus to be more suitable to bless their

new civilised life than the more chaotic power of the Titans.

The Ṛgvedic poet on the contrary — the tradition says it was Grtsamada in this case — celebrates such deeds of Indra as are always repeated. The victory over the Dragon, Vṛtrá, who could first have signified any resistance on the way of Aryans<sup>1</sup>, could mean letting the waters free from the clouds and perhaps also from the mountains; while the victory over the Prison, Valá, could mean the liberation of the Sun after the winter solstice<sup>2</sup>. The former victory was praised in later ritual during the noon pressing of *soma*, and the latter at dawn when red cows were presented to priests as *dakṣiṇā*<sup>3</sup>. Both victories represent what *satyá* Indra is. The last strophe of the hymn declares that Indra is the *satyá* securer of the prey for those who cook the offerings and press the soma for him at sacrifices. And these devotees of Indra are people living in villages, *grāmas*, as strophe 7 informs us, still moving about in their carts and chariots, *ánasā ráthēna*, with their cattle, in the constant war to survive or to get more cattle and better territory. So they were nearer to the nature than the Hellenes in the last creative epoch of their mythology, which is also more recent than the Ṛgvedic hymns, and therefore they looked for the truth, *satyá*, in the scope of that nature. But *satyá* is not a truth in the sense of a fact here, but in the sense of a value, and so Indra is praised as *satyá* only in so far as he is valiant and beneficent to his devotees.

There are permanent events in the nature of the world which are praised in Hellenic mythology too, as I shall illustrate by the next example, but there is hardly any single deed of the gods which is praised in the *Ṛksamhitā*. Perhaps we can mention only the first foundation of the two worlds, or particular acts of godly beneficence towards single devotees. A change of power among the gods, even if we can find some traces of such a thing, is never praised. As Hellenic mythology bears witness to the rise of Hellenic civilisation, so we have some reasons, based on the character of Varuṇa and Mitra, their role in the *rājasūya* ceremony<sup>4</sup>, their suitability for Hittite legal contracts, and perhaps even on some traits of the Persian empire blessed by Ahura Mazda — so akin to Varuṇa — to suspect that the Aryans who descended into the Punjab and India lost some forms of their earlier social organisation and split up into tribal and village communities, smaller than the communities they knew before, all under the blessings of the warlike Indra. Professor Dandekar<sup>5</sup> supposes that Indra was even a historical person, a leader of Aryans. Afterwards he would be transposed into the realm of myth where he occupied the first place. But in India the change in the prevalence between Varuṇa and Indra never generated any myth

1. Cf. BENVENISTE & RENOU, *Vṛtra et Vṛthragna*, Paris, 1934.

2. Cf. HANS-PETER SCHMIDT, *Brhaspati und Indra*, Wiesbaden, 1968.

3. Cf. H. P. SCHMIDT.

4. Cf. *Satapathabrahmaṇa* 5, 2, 3.

5. *Some Aspects of the History of Hinduism*, Poona, 1967.

about their fight. The nearest thing that we can find is something like a competition between them (RV IV 42). No single theogonic events are praised.

3. Hellenic mythology, as presented in Theogony, represents a very large picture of a mythical history of the world and more or less precise genealogies of gods, in which Zeus took his place at the head of the third generation in the main line. To the first generation belong Chaos, Gaia, Tartaros and Eros, then Uranos, Orea and Pontos. To the second belong their children, among them those of Uranos and Gaia: the Titans, Cyclopes and Hecatoncheirs. To the third belong, among others, the children of Kronos and Rheia, the outstanding Titan pair: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. They represent the three succeeding governments over the world. And then, it is said for each one of the gods who his parents and his children are, and often what he is like and what his deeds are. Such a mythology we cannot find in the *Veda*. It seems that Indra's father, beside Dyau, can be also Tvaṣṭar<sup>6</sup>. He is an artist and artisan, like Hephaistos, and made the bolt for Indra, the weapon of his strength. Such a motive can, perhaps, induce the poet to conceive that Tvaṣṭar gave birth to Indra's strength or Indra himself. Perhaps such reasonings guided the Hellenic mythical conceptions too, but relations of parentage, becoming generally fixed there, built a massive genealogy called theogony. In the *Rksamhitā*, on the contrary, the parentage of gods is still something to be inferred and deduced from their nature, if it is mentioned. So the parents of Agni can be Heaven and Earth, but he is also the son of the Waters, or of the two *arāṇis*, or of the ten fingers which rub the *arāṇis*, or Indra gave birth to him as in our hymn<sup>7</sup>. So we have here no genealogy, or, better, genealogy is here still used as a mythical means to express close relations among godlike forces. Without developed logical and philosophical conceptions like cause and effect or substance and accident, myth as a kind of knowledge can use only such relations as those of parentage, succession, etc. As these relations are not freely used by Hesiod and other Hellenic mythologists, but are fixed already, so Winternitz<sup>8</sup> and afterwards Renou<sup>9</sup> called the Ṛgvedic myths mythology in the making.

4. Hesiod depicts what happens when Zeus enters the battle, lightning and thundering, as if he saw it. *Kaví*, the Ṛgvedic poet, enumerates the virtues of Indra, feeling his presence in storms and in battles.

We can take one example more to explain the difference. In the mythical conception of time the alternation of days and nights, light

6. Cf. A. A. MACDONELL, *Vedic Mythology*, Strasbourg, 1897.

7. Cf. MACDONELL.

8. *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, I, Leipzig, 1904.

9. *Religions of Ancient India*, New York, 1968.

and darkness, plays the central role, and what determines it is the course of the Sun. The god who stimulates all creatures, Savitar, is praised in the *Ṛksamhitā* mainly as stimulating them in the form of the Sun. So the hymn RV I 35, str. 1, 4, 5, 11 says:

*hváyāmi agnīm prathamām suastāye  
hváyāmi mitrāvāruṇāv ihāvase /  
hváyāmi rātrīm jágato nivéśanīm  
hváyāmi devām savitāram ūtāye //  
abhīvṛtaṃ kṛśanair viśvārūpaṃ  
hiraṇyaśamyam yajató bṛhāntam /  
āsthād rātham savitā citrābhānuḥ  
kṛṣṇā rājāmsi táviṣīm dādhdhānah //  
vī jánāñ chyāvāḥ śitipādo akhyan  
rātham hiraṇyapraūgam vāhantaḥ /  
śāsvaḥ víśaḥ savitúr dāiviasya  
upāsthe víśvā bhūvanāni tasthuḥ //  
yé te pánthāḥ savitaḥ pūrvīdso  
arenávaḥ súkṛtā antárikṣe /  
tebhír no adyá pathibhiḥ sugébhī  
rákṣā ca no ádhi ca brūhi deva //*

« I call on Agni first for welfare. I call on Mitra and Varuṇa here for aid. I call on Night who calms the world. I call on the god Savitar for help.

The chariot adorned with pearls, assuming every shape, with golden pins, lofty, the adorable Savitar of splendid radiance has mounted, putting his might on dark spaces.

Dark horses with white hoofs viewed the peoples, drawing the chariot with the golden pole. The villages and all beings have always stood in the lap of the divine Savitar.

From those easy passable paths, O Savitar, which are yours, ancient, dustless, well made in the air, protect us and spek for us, O god! ».

For comparison this time we can choose the Homeric hymn XXX or XXXI in praise of Helios. Now the poet does not speak of a single deed of the god, nor is the text a part of a larger whole; we can take it in its entirety:

*Hēlion hymneîn aûte, Diòs tékos, árkeho, Mûsa  
Kalliôpē, phaéthonta, tòn Eurypháessa boôpis  
geînato Gaíēs paidî kai Uranû asteróentos.  
gême gar Eurypháessan agakleitēn Hyperíōn  
autokasignētēn, hē hoi téke kállima tékna,  
Êô te rhodópēkhyn, eyplókamón te Selēnēn,  
Êélión t' akámant', epieíkelon athanátoisin,  
hòs phainēi thnētoîsi kai athanátoisi theoîsin*

*hippois embebaōs° smerdnōn d' hó ge dérketai óssois  
 khryséēs ek kórythos, lamprai d' aktînes ap' autû  
 aiglêen stîlbusi, parà krotáphōn te pareiai  
 lamprai apò kratòs kharien katékhusi prósōpon  
 tēlaugēs° kalòn dè perì kroì lámpetai ésthos  
 lepturgēs, pnoiēi anémōn, hypò d' ársenes hippoi°  
 énth' ár' hó ge stēsas khrysózygon hárma kai híppus  
 théspesios, pémpēisi di' uranû Ókeanónde.  
 khaîre, ánaks, próphrōn dè bîon thymēre° ópaze°  
 ek séo arksámenos klēsō merópōn génos andrōn  
 hemithēōn, hōn érga theoi thnētoisin édeiksan.*

« Helion, O child of Zeus, Muse Kalliope, begin to hymn, the resplendent one, whom Euryphaessa of cow's eyes has borne to the child of Gaia and starry Uranos. For, Hyperion married the famous Euryphaessa, his own sister, who bore him lovely children: Eos of rosy elbows, Selene of beautiful tresses and tireless Helios, similar to immortals, who shines unto mortals and unto immortal gods, when he has mounted his horses. He gazes terrifyingly with his eyes out of the golden helmet. Luminous rays dazzle brilliantly out of him. From his temples onwards, luminous check-ornaments, spreading out of his head, frame the lovely face, visible from afar. Fine clothing, delicately woven, shines round his body, on the breath of winds, swift horses are beneath him. And he, having mounted the chariot with the golden pole and the horses, the divine one, drives through the sky towards the Ocean. Hail, O lord, give me the life dear to my heart gladly! Having begun with thee, I shall praise the race of men demigods who have their fate (or: whose speech is articulated?), and whose deeds the gods have shown to mortals ».

Here the Hellenic poet, *aidós*, begins again with genealogy. Again he makes us feel the holy fear before the gaze of the god, but here he does not speak of a single deed. This is partly connected with the fact that Helios does not quite belong to the Olympic gods, mostly the Kronids; he is the son of other Titans, and is nearer to the forces of nature which perpetuate their activities. There are therefore less stories about his life than about the adventures of the Kronids, which are similar to those of mortal heros. But Helios is here rather human-shaped as well, like the Kronids, and the hymn is an introduction, *prooímion*, to the praise of human heros, as the majority of shorter Homeric hymns are.

Savitar and Helios mount their chariot (Vedic *rátha*, Hellenic *hárma*) with the golden pole, follow their ancient path through the sky, shine brilliantly, and survey all creatures. But while Helios is depicted with a golden helmet, something like luminous ornaments on his cheeks, a lovely face and fine clothing, delicately woven — we can imagine him being similar to Homeric heros, as if we saw such a person — *kaví* dwells much more on such properties of Savtar as his putting his might

on dark spaces, his containing all villages and all beings in his lap, or having the pathes well made in the air, which is all to be felt, but not to be seen. The capacity for vision, as Professor Gonda would translate the term *dhī*<sup>10</sup>, is required for such an experience, because it is not natural phenomena, but forces and order beyond them that *kavī* experiences<sup>11</sup>. So this is not the vision of the visible, but of the invisible, not of what could be painted or sculptured, but of what could not be presented as plastic. Aoidós depicts what we do not see in the Sun as yet, but what is plastic in fact. Other examples presenting Apollo or Pan or different Kronids could demonstrate it even better, but the similarity of nature with Ṛgvedic gods is greater among Hellenic divinities nearer to the Titanic generation. All this is once more confirmed by the fact that Vedic Aryans left no traces of the plastic arts, although they had wonderful poetry, and the Hellenes on the contrary created the ideal of perfection in the plastic arts, which was a challenge to all the later epochs of at least Western art. Moreover, if we have found a greater affinity between the Ṛgvedic deities and the Titans, Helios, Selene, Eos, etc., than between the former and the proper Olympic gods, then it is noteworthy that in Hellenic plastic arts the Olympic gods play the main, if not the only, part. We could say perhaps that Hellenic poetry differs from the plastic arts in its capacity to present the changing pictures, and Ṛgvedic poetry in its presenting no real pictures, but primarily what is invisible, and what only *ḥśis* can « see » and only *kavīs* put in the form of *brāhman*.

The problem of the plastic representation of divinities is linked with the problem of anthropomorphism. From what was said we can easily conclude that, in principle, no anthropomorphism, like that in Hellenic myths, should be possible in Ṛgvedic poetry. If a man of the West speaks of a lack of measure in India even in Ṛgvedic poetry, and still more in later epics, then he is importing the terms and conceptions from his own culture into the one that he has met, and unconsciously, without comparative discrimination, is estimating a characteristic trait of Ṛgvedic poetry as would an exclusive member of the European tradition and a partisan of the Hellenic plastic ideal in poetry. It makes much more sense to accept that another culture can do much more for us than merely give us what we have already. In this case the real benefit that we obtain is the experience of non-plastic visions of our intimacy with secret nature of life.

Hands, legs, horns, heads and other bodily parts, when mentioned in connection with the gods in the *Rksamhitā* — which is the source of the Ṛgvedic myths — so to say, never form the whole body, but remain metaphors for particular traits or forces of the gods; but this does not diminish the beauty of the poems, as the beauty of the non-olympic goddess Eos is not diminished by the wonderful epithet *rhododáktylos*,

10. *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, den Haag, 1963.

11. Cf. GONDA, *Die Religionen Indiens*, Stuttgart, 1960.



the rose-fingered, although it does not suppose the other bodily parts of Eos. If we find however more anthropomorphic traits in Indra than in other gods in the *Ṛksamhitā*, it confirms his particular origin, probably historical, but certainly connected with conditions of life in warlike community, and not only with the forces of life and nature.

There is still something else which we could call anthropomorphism, namely non-physical anthropomorphism; Macdonell names it moral anthropomorphism. That is what we meet in Varuṇa and Mitra. Heinrich Lüders has helped us a lot to understand these two divinities better<sup>12</sup>. They are said to dwell in the middle of waters in the third heaven; they rule as kings over the world and protect the *ṛtā* in it. If we accept Lüder's explanation of *ṛtā* as holy truth, connected with other terms characteristic for these divinities as are *vratā*, a vow, *énaś*, sin, *drúh*, treachery, etc., then we cross over from natural to moral forces connected with these gods. Here we have very interesting parallels in the Hellenic conceptions of *hybris*, arrogance, *moira*, man's lot, *átē*, delusion, etc., and above all *díkē*, justice, as it is conceived by Hesiod, Parmenides, etc. But in any case, these conceptions take us out of the visible world and plastic forms not only among Aryans, but also among Hellenes.

5. In the second example which I chose, we can observe one more difference between *aoidós* and *kaví*. *Aoidós* calls on the Muse or the goddess, she will tell him the hymn; at the end of the poem we come to know that even the deeds of heros, not only the nature of the gods, are shown to mortals by the gods! *Kaví* on the contrary feels his own capability while composing poetry. So RV I 32 begins:

*índrasya nú vírīāni prá vocam*

« Now I will proclaim the heroic deeds of Indra ».

This beginning can remind us of the Hellenic *kléa andrôn*, the praise of men, and of Homer's words « *Mênin áeide, theá* » or « *Ándra moi énnēpe, Músa* », but there is no goddess invoked, but it is *kaví* himself who will tell the praise of the hero. And RV IV 58, str. 5 says:

*etā aršanti hṛdyāt samudrāc  
chatāvraja ripúnā nāvacákṣe /  
ghṛtāsya dhārā abhi cākaṣṭmi  
hiraṇyāyo vetasó mādhyā āsām //*

« The streams of melted butter flow from the sea of the heart, behind a hundred fences, so that a deceiver cannot see them; I see them, the golden reed is in their middle ».

The last verses present the *kaví* as somebody who sees the truth hidden to the eye of deceivers, but his vision reveals the streams of

12. Varuṇa, Göttingen, 1951-1959.

*ghṛtá* as flowing from the sea of the heart; it reveals something invisible, but strongly experienced. So we could discriminate between the inspiration on the Hellenic side and the vision of the invisible on the R̥gvedic side.

As an aside, it could be mentioned that this vision somehow contradicts revelation, as activity contradicts passivity. So we can perhaps call *śruti* by the term revelation, but we must be conscious of the fact that the Bible is revealed by God in so far as there is said in it only what God wanted to say to the chosen people; while the *Veda* contains only what *ṛṣis* and *kavis* saw and heard by their own power of vision, be it hymns, melodies, metres or rituals.

*Aoidós* narrates the myths, *tūs mythus légei*, to an audience. In the famous verses 169-173. from the Homeric hymn I to Apollo, *aoidós* asks his listeners to remember him after he is gone, and to answer the strangers, who could ask them:

*ô kûrai, tís d' ymmin anēr hēdistos aoidôn  
entháde pōlēitai, kaì téōi térpesthe málista;*

« O girls, which man is the sweetest to you among the bards coming here? And in whom do you delight most? »,

*typhlós anēr, oikēi dè Khiōi éni paipaloéssēi,  
tû pāsai metó pisthen aristeúusin aoidái.*

« The blind man who lives on the rocky Chios. All his poems will excel in the future ».

*Kavi* has no such audience, he speaks to gods, as does *aoidós* too, but he does not speak to human listeners. However, he can be *rtātvā vípro dīrghaśrūd* (VII 61, str. 2), the enthusiastic truth-telling poet whose fame is widespread, as *Vasiṣṭha* was.

*Kavi* composes myths, perhaps we could say: *tūs mythus poiei*, but does not narrate them; we could not say for him: *tūs mythus légei*, in the same sense as for *aoidós*. In this sense there is no *mythología* in the *R̥ksamhitā*.

Sometimes *kavi* repeats the *mánmans* and *bráhmans* of others, but often he « sees » them himself by his power of vision. His visions are often unique and seldom closely connected in any systematic way. Relations among gods also build no real system in his poetry. In this sense too, he produces nothing like a system of theogony such as we find in Hesiod, or in the Homeric hymns and other mythological works that bear witness to the existence of such a system because they presuppose it (for they present its fragments in their genealogies and stories). From such a system of myths *aoidós* produces his mythological poems. Nothing similar can we find in the *R̥ksamhitā*. In this respect we could say that we find only single myths there, but no mythology. That does not mean, of course, that the R̥gvedic myths do not belong to a rather harmonious

whole, which contains, it is true, many layers, but only that this whole is more a world of piercing thoughts and visions, than a systematized body of godly stories in plastic pictures.

All this could be exposed at large, but that is not the task of this paper. But we can take yet another viewpoint concerning these last remarks. The Muse that *aoidós* called on in our example is Kalliope, the Muse of epic poetry. It did not happen at random. Hellenic myths are preserved to us mostly in the epic form. This form makes possible long narrations, and, being generally consecrated to the praise of heros, it confers a human and worldly character to godlike subjects too. Ṛgvedic strophes, on the contrary, ask for succinct formulations, they form powerful self-sufficient sentences, *māntras*, and interrupt any longer narration or require repeated connecting statements. The connection of *mythos* and *épos*, so to say, can be found in India in *Purāṇas* and great epics, and many characteristics of Hellenic mythology can find correspondences there, rather than in the *Ṛksamhitā*.

6. Sacrifice has been mentioned already in connection with the hymns of the *Ṛksamhitā* and the gods which they celebrate. These hymns themselves form a part of the sacrificial ritual. But the sacrificial ritual at the time of the hymns collected in the *Ṛksamhitā* is not well known. It is necessary to infer what it was like from *Brāhmaṇas* and *Sūtras* on one side, and testimonies in the hymns on the other. From the comparative point of view these questions of ritual are extremely interesting, but as they open vast new spaces before our eyes, we should be very brief on this point if we are not to stray from our topic. The words of *kavi* confer the power of truth, *satyá* or *ṛtá*, on the ritual. The gods invoked at the ceremony sit down on the *védi*, the sacrificial altar, and while priests are preparing the offerings, the hymns are recited. These filled the gods with power and made them grow. The praise of gods, so to say, was included in a refined interpretation according to which the gods grow from honeyed words, godly thoughts and from the truth about themselves. Ṛgvedic hymns bear many witnesses to their ritual role, and it gives a special and powerful meaning to them.

Hellenic mythical poetry plays no part in ritual. Homeric hymns, for instance, could often have been a part of the celebrations on holy days and in sanctuaries, but not of sacrifices or any ritual. Shorter hymns were introductions or finales of recitations about the deeds of men. But their recitation was a meritorious act as well, for which the poet could ask good grace from the god he was celebrating.

### III

All the specifications that were mentioned, and as much as possible illustrated from texts, show how different the world of Ṛgvedic myths is from that of Hellenic myths.

We should try now to look at the whole from yet another aspect, then to sum up what has been said and to conclude this paper.

In the Hellenic heritage of the European culture the word *mythos* does not stand alone. It is a part of a terminological system in which, so to say roughly, it is distinguished from the words *lógos* and *épos*. All three have the same common meaning: word, speech. But only *lógos* can mean something like argument, logic, only *épos* something like a heroic narration, epic, and only *mythos* can mean an aetiologic story about gods or about mortals whose excellence cannot be conceived without the concurrence of gods. The historical connection of myth with epic by the Hellenes determined a great deal of the nature of their myth.

The division of the Vedic corpus provides us with fundamental traits of a terminological system created by the Indian Aryans. The whole of the *Veda* can be divided into *mántras* and *bráhmaṇas*. Since *bráhmaṇas* explain the ritual sense and function of *bráhmanas* (which are *mántras*), so Ṛgvedic words, *bráhmanas* or *mántras*, in that terminological system are conceived as a part of the ritual according to their sense. Although *Bráhmaṇas*, which are later works, present us with a very different kind of ritual than the evidence in the *Ṛksamhitā*, nevertheless even such forms developed from the forms of the latter.

The comparison of the two terminological systems, which are here somehow simplified, leads us again more or less to the same specifications of the two worlds of myth as have been shown already.

We can call a *mántra* myth, for it is neither *lógos* nor *épos*. But while myths, as a divine history, are told to the audience by the Hellenes, *mántras*, as a divine technique, should exercise their power over the world and prove their influence on the gods themselves, to whom they are recited. While *kaví* participates in the forces that he praises in his hymns, *aoidós* is separated from them and has no real influence on them.

The divinities in the Hellenic myth are involved in the epic praises of heros, and share with the heros the same limpid and sonorous clearly shaped world of Hellenic poetry. This is perhaps what bestows on gods the precise genealogies, anthropomorphic traits and particular unrepeatable deeds. The same poets celebrate gods and men. Often the gods have virtues and vices similar to those of men — more so in Homer, less in Hesiod — but they excel in might, dignity, beauty and immortality. The wondering experience of their nature is therefore the holy fear, *sébas*. So all the specific differences of Hellenic myth unite on their side to a harmonious picture of the world to which they belong.

In the Ṛgvedic myth — if we can call *mántra*, *mánman* or *bráhman* by this term — men as sacrificers participate in natural and moral forces in the world. Men can strongly experience and marvel at these forces, but cannot visualize them clearly, except in metaphor, because they are penetrated by them when communicating with the gods. There-

fore there remains no space for distinctly limited limpid shapes. It becomes hard to avoid evil and to attain good as distinct from it in ritual; it is a great knowledge. Even permanent distinctions among persons may disappear — the gods penetrate each another as Soma penetrates Indra, or they penetrate mortals as Agni penetrates *kavi* — and how much less fixed genealogies or recorded unrepeatable single deeds can exist! Thus do the specific differences of Ṛgvedic myth on their side build a proper harmonious world.

But in the latter world it could be better not to use the word mythology, and to preserve it for the particular character of the former. In this way, we would not efface the fullness of its meaning which can help us to describe more appropriately the purāṇic myths. On the other side, we should use words like *māntra*, *brāhman*, etc. to have the proper terms for the full meaning of the Ṛgvedic myths.

This does not refute the fact that the common traits and motives of one and the other mythical world prove their partially common origin, nor does this seek to avoid their comparison, because the former has been demonstrated by the textual examples which were chosen, and the latter was the main content of this paper. But what was said tried to illustrate that comparisons cannot be reduced to equations, nor must they be reducible to general conceptions or terms taken from one side of comparison, but the general result of comparison may be the relation of the sides itself.

There are other terminological problems that could be initiated here about such words as inspiration, vision, revelation, or polytheism, god, etc., but it is not the task of this paper to solve any of these problems, but only to illustrate an effort to preserve the fullness of contents of different cultures in front of abstraction alone, which can bring it into danger. Only by preserving it can we work on the building of the culture of mankind in its whole richness within each single culture, and avoid the fall of particular cultures into general « objective » oblivion. If this is the task of philology in the whole field of textual testimonies of all cultures, than it has a definite dignity as a service to our life.